

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Secondary Education Committee

My name is Marie Pinette. This is my testimony for March 3, 5 pm for the Appropriations Secondary Education Sub-Committee.

I am writing to request that you strongly oppose the Governor's proposed 1.35 million dollars cut to our Youth Service Bureaus.

The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission report recommends:

1. "The Commission (The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission) advocates a comprehensive, integrated approach to mental health that prioritizes healthy child development, which in turn requires healthy families and caring, resilient communities"
2. It suggest that we should be "laying the groundwork for lifelong mental health" and (page 76)
3. "Treating the whole person and the whole family with family centered care"

The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission report also recommends on page 97 that

4. "Connecticut must build a mental health system which targets detection and treatment while building stronger, resilient communities of care."
5. " Addressing a fragmented underfunded behavioral health system tainted by stigma requires building a comprehensive, integrated approach to care. The approach will stress family involvement and community resilience. "
6. " Identifying risk factors, reinforcing protective factors, and promoting positive youth development throughout will be key goals and peer as well as professional support will be involved. Treatment and prevention will be involved.

This is what Youth Service Bureaus do. In every aspect of functioning, this is what they were designed and chartered to do. YSB's are integrally involved in the identification, treatment, and referral of children with mental health needs and their families. YSBs have their finger on the pulse of their respective towns, many of us conducting research on what the state is of at risk behavior in the youth of each respective town and then work feverishly designing programs that help support these families and build strong, resilient communities. Many YSBs offer individual and family counseling, case management, crisis intervention, and referrals. YSBs also offer a whole host of Positive Youth Development programming after school and during the summer as well as play an integral role in the diversion of juveniles from the justice system.

The research clearly demonstrates that asset building efforts and programming have had a significant impact on reducing at risk behavior in our communities. Part of these great strides forward is largely due to our focus and ability to create long lasting relationships with youth and their families over an extended period of time. Because many of us offer counseling, prevention, parenting education and positive youth development programming, we are able to offer wrap around services that help to

support each family's unique needs. And when we aren't able to offer the service directly, we are then in a position to offer critical referrals. Youth Service Bureaus serve as the grassroots hub of local agencies and resources for youth and families.

Furthermore, the Sandy Hook Commission Report recommends that

7. "Connecticut develop a comprehensive statewide plan for responding to large-scale school crisis events that includes educational and behavioral health agencies. In our town, we've been working hard for 2 years collaborating regularly with Clinton Public schools on co-creating such a crisis response plan and vetted network of local professionals who can support the community in the event of a crisis. Our town crisis response plan will integrate the resources of many critical sectors of Clinton, not just our first responders.

With all the millions of dollars in grant money which has gone toward updating the physical safety of our schools and all the effort being given to making dramatic changes in gun control, why are we turning our back on addressing mental health concerns.

Cutting \$1.35 million from YSBs will be like cutting off a major lifeline to communities all across the state.

YSBs need every dime of our funding to maintain the progress we've made so far and continue to move forward during an age where technology becomes yet another obstacle to effectively addressing mental health issues. It would be bad enough to respond to the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission Report with silence, but are we really going to respond to it with a dramatic REDUCTION of the support and services it is calling for?

Please fully fund our Youth Service Bureaus and restore any of the proposed cuts!

Respectfully,

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